



Photo by Bob Gress

Pros & Cons of Beaver Dams: Humans have had a love-hate relationship with beavers. Crop lands have been flooded by beavers, roadways have been covered & property owners adjoining a stream have found their land submerged. Overall, beavers have a very positive impact on nature and the environment. Their dams offer excellent nesting areas for ducks & other waterfowl. The dams offer sunning places for creatures like snakes and turtles. The lake formed by the beaver dam prevents erosion to the land, provides a home to new wildlife such as fish, insects, frogs, salamanders and many types of aquatic plants. The lake traps large amounts of sediment creating a rich, fertile lake bottom. When the dam finally breaks, a large area of rich, fertile land is left which will progress into a meadow and eventually a forest.



Ten Fast Facts About Beavers

1. Beavers are vegetarians (Herbivores).
2. They have the same mate for life.
3. Beavers are powerful swimmers & can stay underwater up to 15 minutes.
4. Beavers are active at night (Nocturnal).
5. A baby beaver is called a kit. There may be eight kits born at one time.
6. A beaver is our largest rodent.
7. Beavers comb their hair with their split front claw.
8. Beavers can live for 16 years.
9. A beaver alters its surrounding more than any other creature, except humans.
10. A pair of beavers may cut 400 trees in one year.



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Beavers: Nature's Engineers

Philpott Lake





Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

The beaver averages a weight of 35 pounds. Their length ranges from 41-46". They have dark brown, soft fur which was much sought after by early trappers for hats, coats & ornamental purposes. His wide 6-8" paddle shaped tail acts as a rudder when the beaver is swimming and helps support it when it stands upright on land. The tail is used to slap the water to warn other beavers of danger. Beavers are well adapted for life in the water. They have oversized webbed rear feet which propel them while swimming. Their eyelids are clear, enabling them to see underwater. Their nose and ears have valves which close when they are submerged. They can easily swim 1/2 mile without coming up for air.



Photo by Charles Brandt

Beavers use their very strong, orange colored incisor teeth to cut trees and limbs. These teeth are constantly growing. Their powerful jaws enable them to gnaw on wood. They love the bark of aspen, willow, cottonwood and poplar trees and eat the leaves and soft woody layer called the cambium. The beaver wastes nothing. What is not eaten is used to build a dam or a lodge. It will also store sticks and limbs on the bottom of the lake for use as food during the winter. The average size of



trees cut are 6-8 inches. Beavers have been known to cut trees up to 30 inches in diameter. Since the beaver is always adjusting the size of its dam it will travel hundreds of feet from its lake to reach new trees. When the beaver travels farther from the water, it becomes more vulnerable to predators. Around Philpott, the only natural predators a beaver has is the black bear, the fox, coyote and bobcat. Young beavers may be attacked by mink, owls, hawks or eagles.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Beavers always cut trees to a length they can manage. Then they will use a variety of sizes and lengths to construct a dam. They will search, just like an engineer, for the best location on a stream to build a dam. A dam can be forty feet long and as much as ten feet high. Behind the dam a lake is formed. In the lake, the beaver will build its house called a lodge. The lodge is entered from one or more underwater tunnels. The lodge's living quarters are above water, keeping the beavers warm and dry. Beavers are very clean and even build separate rooms in its lodge to be used as its bathroom. Because of the underwater entrance the beaver is safe from most predators. It will constantly adjust the dam to maintain the lake level to protect the lodge's underwater entrance. Beaver dams have been known to stand for 100 years. In a lake like Philpott, the beaver may not build a lodge, but live in a burrow instead. A burrow will be entered through an underwater hole in the lake bank.